

Examination Reform and Educational Change in Sri Lanka 1972-82: Modernisation or Dependent Underdevelopment?

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The examination system in Sri Lanka, as in many other countries, provides access to power, prestige and income in both domestic and international labour markets.

During the past ten years it has been reformed twice. On both occasions the reforms provided a focus for political debate on the need for general education reform and on the employment needs of the economy.

This paper examines these reforms in detail together with the context within which they have occurred. Analytically, it seeks to deepen understanding of the value of the two dominant development paradigms - neo-classical/modernisation theory and neo-Marxist/dependency theory - in interpreting a specific set of educational reforms, and to contribute towards sharpening their explanatory power.

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INTRODUCTION

The people are perturbed over the present system of examinations which is only accepted locally. The system will be changed so that our qualifications will be accepted the world over.

Deputy Minister of Education

The preoccupation of all of us with what occurs in developed societies has stifled our intellectuals, thinkers and innovators in education ... Often the middle class parent gets away with 'you know the (exam) is not recognised by U.K. education authorities!.' We have not even held the first examination. This is still how our education is judged seemingly by those who should know better ... if we can make an attempt, a new approach, our innovative centres will be serving the causes of intellectual de-colonisation.

Secretary and Director General of Education

The London B.A. degree aims at saturating the best educated men in the Island with ancient Western traditions and literature and modern Western languages and views. We cannot imagine the youth of Ceylon becoming a better administrator, judge, doctor or pleader through his study of German and French and Greek whilst he is unable to read or write his own tongue. We do not require a more Western but a more Eastern education.

Principal of Trinity College, Kandy.

In 1972 far-reaching changes were introduced into the education system of Sri Lanka. For the first time since the nineteenth century a new system of examining unconnected to UK norms was introduced in secondary schools with the specific purpose of breaking once and for all with colonially inherited patterns of schooling. Ceylon 'O' and 'A' level examinations were replaced by National and Higher National Certificates of Education (NCG and HNCE) designed to match indigenously developed curricula derived from locally defined education priorities. In 1977 these

reforms were largely abandoned in favour of a return to 'O' and 'A' level type examining and an emphasis on the international comparability of public school examinations. In a developing country independent for over 30 years with an education system controlled locally for nearly 50 years the chronological order of the introductory quotes is rather surprising. The first statement was made in 1977, the second in 1975 and the third in 1906.

This paper has three main purposes. First, we wish to examine in detail the historical context of the 1972 educational reforms, and, in particular, to focus on the school examination reforms. Second, we will trace through the aftermath of these reforms in order to establish the conditions which led to the abandonment of many of them after 1977. Third, since we wish to progress beyond the mere description of events, we will attempt to relate these processes to development theory in ways which highlight its adequacy to explain events within a framework that extends beyond the vagaries of internal education policy.

The reason we have chosen to focus our attention on examination reform requires some brief elaboration. Centralised examination systems have played a key role in the development of most educational systems (Dore 1976). Not only do they act to monitor and often define educational standards and educational aims, they also control and legitimate access to further education and occupational futures in modern economies. They provide primary mechanisms for the allocation of opportunities and, perhaps most importantly, serve to shape the aspirations and expectations of subsequent generations. The more restricted the opportunities available and the more unequal the benefits associated with them the greater the likelihood that examination 'backwash' becomes a determining characteristic of the quality of school achievement. The education systems of most developing countries are strongly influenced by examinations. Sri Lanka is no exception.

Official government reports as well as independent commentators have voiced grave concerns.

Throughout their history the public examinations in Ceylon have had a strong tendency to copy those in England. This was thought to be desirable in order to secure international recognition of the school certificates and thereby facilitate the flow of students into foreign universities ... The chief ill effects of copying foreign examinations have been a retardation of curriculum development and a fostering of the prevalent attitude that the foreign article is always better than the local article.

(Government of Sri Lanka)

The London Matriculation examination was introduced in 1882 followed by the Cambridge School Certificate in 1916 and London 'A' level in 1950. Other local exams were based directly on the British equivalent - the Cambridge Junior and Senior Local Examinations (1880); Vernacular School Certificate (1933); Senior School Certificate (1941); Ceylon GCE 'O' level (1952); and Ceylon GCE 'A' level (1964).

Against this long historical background of externally shaped examining the break in 1972 appeared particularly interesting since it did, in principle, remove an overriding constraint on educational development orientated towards nationally defined goals. The return of 'O' and 'A' level examining after 1977, a superficially retrograde step, also seemed to us to demand considered analysis since it was a movement against the emerging orthodoxy of much general development theory. This has increasingly stressed the importance of breaking those colonially inherited linkages with developed countries which promote and maintain 'dependent' development against the interests of the mass of the population. As Mazrui (1975) has emphasized:

One could indeed define development in the Third World as modernization minus dependency ... The changes that improve living standards, reduce infant mortality, curtail ignorance and disease and enhance knowledge of human beings and the environments are ones imperialism helped to foster. The changes deserve to survive. But those aspects of modernization that reduce local autonomy, erode local self-confidence, and undermine the capacity of the Third World to contribute to genuinely shared world culture should be eliminated. In time the concept of modernization should become distinct from the concept of Westernization.

(Mazrui 1975).

In undertaking this analysis we have found it necessary to develop this paper in parts. The first elaborates two major theoretical perspectives on development which might contribute to explanations of the events we describe. These derive from neo-classical economics and modernisation theory on the one hand and neo-Marxist and dependency theory on the other. To our knowledge, examination reform in Sri Lanka has not been considered from such perspectives before. The second part provides a brief introduction to Sri Lanka for the reader unfamiliar with the socio-economic system, and traces the history of Ceylonese access to elite jobs through the acquisition of examination certificates. The third part focuses specifically on examination reform in 1972, its consequences and the events leading up to the changes of 1977. The final part draws together conclusions of the analysis and reflects on their wider implications for examination reform elsewhere and for development theory.

Theoretical Perspectives - Similarities and Differences between Modernisation and Dependency Theory

Two theoretical frameworks have dominated development thinking over the last 20 years. The first, provided by neo-classical economics and modernisation theory has provided most of the core concepts which guided development policy throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s. During this period development economists moved from an almost obsessional concern with incremental capital output ratios and rates of growth in GNP towards a more eclectic appreciation of the importance of the finer structure of the economy and qualitative aspects of manpower supply (Nurske 1957; Schultz 1961; Denison 1964). Human capital theory (Becker 1964) came to occupy serenely the centre stage in educational planning and the technological functionalism on which it was based provided clear links with the functionalist tradition of sociological analysis most clearly exemplified by Davis and Moore (1945). Modernisation theory emerged in the 1960s partly as a response to the frustration of planners impatient with the disappointing record of the First Development Decade. The argument used was that if neo-classical economic theory was valid, and the experience of the rich countries suggested that it was, then failure to develop rapidly must have its origins within the structure of society and the culture of poor countries. Thus the problem of development was inextricably linked to the creation of 'modern' man who was characterised as universalistic, future orientated, educated, achievement orientated and rationally minded (Inkles and Smith, 1974; McClelland 1961).

Marxist, or more correctly neo-Marxist theory, has provided a competing theoretical framework for development and has inspired the articulation of dependency theory (Frank 1967; Cardoso 1972; Dos Santos 1973; Foster Carter 1974; Leys 1975). The 'dependency' perspective views underdevelopment as a necessary outcome of systematic exploitation and manipulation of the periphery by the centre. Poor countries are conditioned by their economic relationships with rich economies to occupy a subordinate and dependent role which inhibits development by expropriating investible surplus. Indigenous elites, firmly wedded to the international capitalist system and rewarded handsomely by it, have no motivation to become less dependent and possess the power to prevent other sectors of societies from doing so. The framework is not as starkly mechanistic as this brief characterisation implies and has been refined in response to criticism of its cruder variants. Dos Santos (1973), for example, has been at pains to emphasise the distinction between conditioning and determining factors of development and has stressed the importance of internal, national structures for the latter. Dependency theory accords overriding importance to the historical conditions which provide a context for development and to the international

system of 'global exploitation' managed by the developed capitalist countries. Moreover, dependency is conceived of as a social phenomenon which goes far beyond economic relationships alone. Thus Carnoy (1974) stresses that:

 this structure (of dependent relations) creates a 'cultural alienation' ... which is manifested in the need to copy everything in the developed metropolises. Desired values and norms are taken from the metropole not from local experience ... Cultural dependency, which includes dependence on technology, concepts and art forms, severely limits the possibilities of new forms of institutional development emerging.

Writers within both of these major theoretical frameworks have examined aspects of educational development, but none to our knowledge has specifically sought to consider the development and consequences of adopting particular patterns of public examination within school systems. This is a surprising omission since this institution provides the primary mechanism through which most societies legitimate the allocation of individuals to positions of power and control. Examinations also regulate and qualitatively influence the skills and capabilities on which subsequent development must in part depend.

It is true that concern for the quality of manpower supply has stimulated work within a neo-classical tradition on systems of educational qualification which provide access to international labour markets. This stemmed from a concern with the 'brain drain' experienced in a number of countries, including Sri Lanka (Nesiah 1978), which was seen to lead to a diminution of the stock of human capital and reduce the social returns to educational investment. Some 'internationalists' argued that:

 the international circulation of human capital is a beneficial process since it reflects the free choices of individuals who chose to migrate ... it is true that when these countries become fully developed they will need and be able to employ much larger numbers of educated people; but this does not imply that in their present circumstances additional educated people would necessarily contribute significantly to their development.

(Johnson 1968)

More perceptive economists argued that the central problem of the 'brain drain' phenomenon was that of the structures within which individual decision-making takes place and that emigration of qualified manpower not only impoverished the resources available for development but also led to the over-

production of inappropriate skills as a result of the hegemony of international certification. Development goals of redistribution, growth and appropriate education and training, they argued, could best be served by disengagement from the international system of professional qualification (Godfrey 1978). This is similar to the position taken by dependency theorists, though they would argue that since the 'brain drain' was a natural consequence of a dependent economic system dominated by the international division of labour, a system of schooling which complements all people's social utility is not possible without changes in economic relations (Carnoy 1974).

Our concern here, however, is not with the 'brain drain' phenomenon as such but with changes in examination systems and the factors that underly those changes. Exponents of both theoretical frameworks described earlier offer explanations - though some would argue 'only descriptions' - of change over time. Rarely have attempts been made to systematically compare the efficacy of such competing explanations for educational change, and never for examination system change. The systematic comparison is what we attempt here. We begin with the identification of key similarities and differences between the two traditions.

Educational Change and Conflict

Both perspectives incorporate a considerable measure of agreement on the nature of relationships between the education system of a country and the wider economic and social context. Both see the content and processes of education as a reflection of patterns of social organisation and production. The 'correspondence principle' advanced by Bowles and Gintis (1976) clearly imputes that schooling reflects and replicates the social relations of production in the economy and that it changes in response to prior changes in those relations. This neo-Marxist perspective was expressed some 70 years earlier by Durkheim, a founding father of the sociology of education and a proponent of the 'functionalism' from which modernisation theory is descended. Thus Durkheim argues:

educational transformations are always the result and the symptom of the social transformation in terms of which they are to be explained.

(Durkheim 1969)

This is not to deny the existence of the neo-classical belief in education as an 'engine of growth' so characteristic of the thinking of the 1950s, but this was in some respects an aberration of the main stream of argument which has more generally cast public education systems in a conservative role.

Nor is it to deny the possibility recognised by dependency theorists that:

schooling does have a certain autonomy within the political, social and economic system. Despite its primary function of selection and socialisation, it does produce individuals who are not only agents of change within the dependent system, but also some who want to break the dependent situation. Through increased schooling the dominant groups in the society may unintentionally create forces opposed to dependency and the dominance of groups who live off the dependent system.

(Carnoy 1974)

But this autonomy is seen by the dependency theorists as a contradiction rather than a dominant form.

In both frameworks educational change, therefore, comes about through forms of conflict between the education system and the wider socio-economic context and adjustment. It is most importantly in the underlying reasons for such conflict and the means for their resolution that the approaches differ substantially. It is to key differences with implications for our analysis that we now turn.

Consensus or Conflict? Norm or Deviation?

The first difference is that neo-classical and modernisation theory adopt the functionalist assumption that a high degree of normative consensus exists within a society and that conflict is a pathological deviation from that consensus (Paulston 1976). Thus the promotion of changes which do not clearly arise from 'societal needs' as a result of changes in the socio-economic environment are 'dysfunctional'. Clark provided a typical example of functional change when developing his ideas on technological functionalism:

Greater schooling for greater numbers has brought with it and evidently implies a greater practicality in what the schools teach and what they do for students. The existence of children of diverse ability calls forth the comprehensive school, or the multi-school comprehensive structure, within which some students receive a broad general education but others take primarily a technical or commercial training. In short, increased quantity means greater vocationalism.

(Clark 1962) (Authors' emphasis)

In contrast, neo-Marxist and dependency theorists do not see conflict as part of a pathology but as a necessary consequence of competition between groups with opposing convictions and status for power and control. Consensus is a pathological deviation from conflict. When it does occur, it is to be regarded with suspicion since it implies 'co-option' or 'false consciousness'. Educational change is problematic unless it occurs within a revolutionary situation. To the extent that change is acknowledged within a non-revolutionary situation then it is explained by the realignment of interest groups.

Group Interests or Individual Interests?

The relative importance of conflict and consensus separates the two approaches; so also does their different stress on the importance of group (class) interests and those of individuals. For the functionalist normative consensus is primarily an expression of the convergence of individual interests. Consensus, conflict, competition and reward are all viewed as individual level phenomena. For the neo-Marxist on the other hand, group or class interests are the definitive characteristic of social and economic interaction. Consensus, conflict, competition and reward are first and foremost group level phenomena.

The Purpose of Selection - the Certification of Competency or the Legitimation of Economic Inequality?

The third difference which separates the two approaches is the legitimacy accorded to public examinations in allocating roles in society. Neo-classical and modernisation perspectives generally stress the necessity and fairness of selection of individuals through meritocratic examination competitions. Achievement in such examinations certifies abilities and effort and provides access to differential rewards in the economy on a relatively impartial basis. Such rewards are distributed in accordance with the supply and demand for particular skills and reflect the value of the individual's contribution to the productive process. Selection is inevitable and schools are generally the institutions which perform this function.

Sorting must take place at some point in the educational structure. If, at that level, it does not take place at the door, it must occur inside the doors The college offers the ability to try, but the student's own ability and his accumulative record of performance finally insist that he be sorted out.

(Clark 1962)

To a neo-Marxist, selection of this kind may also be seen as inevitable given a particular pattern of the division of labour in the economy. Its social purpose however is interpreted differently. Far from selecting students in 'fair' competitions it merely 'legitimises existing economic inequalities by persuading workers that their own economic success, be it great or small, is deserved on the basis of fair scholastic competition'. (Bowles, Gintis and Simmons 1976).

The competition is far from fair and primarily serves the cause of social class reproduction, 'since the ostensible objectives and meritocratic entrance and promotion standards favour the economically advantaged'. (Bowles, Gintis and Simmons 1976).

As Carnoy notes:

Neo-classical development theory views schooling as a 'liberating' process in which the child is transformed from a 'traditional' individual to a 'modern' one. This transition is supposed to enable the child to be creative as well as functional ... and enable the graduate to contribute to the economy, polity and society. But in dependency theory, the transformation that takes place in school cannot be liberating since a person is changed from one role in a dependent system to a different role in the same system ... Rather than being a means through which individuals fulfil their potential the schools are reduced to being largely selectors and socialisers.

(Carnoy 1974)

The Importance of the Historical Context of Development

A fourth difference is the importance attached to an understanding of the historical context within which development takes place. Neo-classical approaches to development have not until recently accorded much significance to the events which have led to contemporary disparities in developmental levels. Even Frank, trained in Chicago as an economist, recognised that he originally thought of development problems

in terms of largely domestic problems of capital scarcity, feudal and traditional institutions which impede saving and investment, concentration of political power in the hands of rural oligarchies, and many of the universally known and supposed obstacles of economic development of supposedly traditionally and underdeveloped societies. (Frank 1967)

Only after working in Latin America did he become convinced that the history of underdeveloped economies was the most important factor in explaining their condition. Typically, the role of history in determining developmental possibilities was largely ignored by neo-classical economists in the early 1960s and it was only after the early stage models of economic development (Rostow 1960) and their refinements (Adelman and Morris 1973) were shown to provide an insufficient basis for development planning that some shifts became apparent. In contrast, dependency theorists have always emphasised the critical importance of the historical experience. And not only the history of the national society but its historical relations with more economically developed countries. Thus

it became evident that the unit of analysis of development can no longer be the nation state alone. Even if one must still begin from the particular country one is interested in, its specific historical development process must be put in the context of the evolution of capitalism globally and of its local internal manifestations. These have typically been the determining factors that have triggered off profound processes of structural transformation. The establishment of colonies, the struggle against the colonisers, decolonisation ... transfers of foreign institutions and culture generally - these all play a central role in the historical evolution of every underdeveloped country (Sunkel 1979).

Elites - Beneficent Modernisers or Conspiratorial Hegemonists?

The fifth difference important for this paper concerns the role of national elites. Both theoretical approaches regard the formation, attitudes and behaviour of national elites as important determinants of social change. The labels attached to these elites differ. Neo-Marxists use the language of class stratification and conflict to refer to comprador classes and bourgeois elites acting within a framework of 'transnational' convergence of interests and:

conceive of the relationship between external and internal forces as forming a complex whole whose structural links are not based on mere external forms of exploitation and coercion, but are rooted in coincidences of interests between locally dominant classes and international ones and, on the other side, are challenged by locally dominated groups and classes (Cardoso and Faletto 1969).

Some go as far as to relegate local elites to the status of a lumpenbourgeoisie incapable of independent accumulation and blind to their real interests (Frank 1974) who are

'incorporated' into a system of global exploitation. Most importantly for this paper, dependency theory holds that the transnational community is

made up of people that belong to different nations but who have similar values, beliefs, ideas (and a lingua franca - English) as well as remarkably similar patterns of behaviour as regards career patterns, family structures, housing, dress, consumption patterns and cultural orientations in general (Sunkel and Fuenzalida 1979).

This identity of values and beliefs, it is argued, necessarily brings them into conflict with other groups in the national society whose culture, in turn, is devalued.

Neo-classical development theory on the other hand perceives no necessary conflict between the interests of the national elite and those of the mass of people. 'Modernising' elites are admittedly guided by Western models of education, career development, job allocation and patterns of consumption. But this modernisation is generally assumed to be in the interests of all groups in society even though it has become clear that the 'trickle down' effects of elite-led growth have been, in many countries, more like drips into sand than rivulets of redistribution (Chenery 1974). Since modernisation theory is essentially bound up with the notion of imitative development it is not surprising that the replication and often quantitative exaggeration of educational structures derived from the West should be regarded without great concern. The expansion of Western style secondary and tertiary education is seen as a good thing in so far as it extends opportunity to the mass of the population and acts as a vehicle to enhance 'modernisation' of the population. The view that what is good for the elite is necessarily good for the masses necessarily presupposes a normative consensus of individual and societal goals. The neo-Marxist would argue that such normative consensus was illusory and merely reflected the real and dominant interests of the elite who had successfully co-opted subordinate groups to act against their true class interests through a 'false consciousness' of their condition.

The Evaluation of Intentional and Unintentional Action

The sixth and final difference we wish to highlight is probably the crudest, yet it is the most fundamental. It comes in two separate parts. The first concerns an evaluation of the intentions of the agents of change. The second is the evaluation of the consequences of these intentions.

In casting the verb 'to underdevelop' in transitive form, the dependency theories of underdevelopment imply conscious mal-intent on the part of groups within metropolitan countries to subordinate those at the periphery of the system (Dore 1977). Modernisation theories by contrast do not impute conscious intent of this kind to change agents. Modernisation theories are more evolutionary. Change is attributed to factors such as the availability of economic resources and social psychological dispositions such as high individual needs for achievement rather than to a common intent on the part of elites to develop or underdevelop the economy.

Overlapping this dimension of intention vs. non-intention is an evaluation of the consequences of the intentional and non-intentional action. For dependency theorists the consequences of intentional underdevelopment are the perpetuation of dependence of the masses, the continued domination of elites and undermining of a country's self-reliant development. All three consequences are evaluated negatively and are seen as antithetical to development. For the modernisation theorist however, most consequences of change are evaluated positively. Because specific groups of actors are not thought to be 'developing' or 'underdeveloping' the society, then changes that do come about are considered to be more 'natural', 'inevitable' and therefore perhaps not-negative.

The basic value positions taken by dependency and modernisation theorists are important since they underpin explanations of the past and justifications for future policy. For example, it clearly matters a great deal whether integration into international labour markets through internationally recognised and moderated examinations is seen as a manifestation of undesirable dependency fundamentally opposed to self-reliant development, or whether it is seen as a natural consequence of convergence towards rich country socio-economic conditions.

The remainder of this paper is devoted to exploring examination reform in Sri Lanka against the background of the theoretical issues outlined above. It is not possible to test scientifically the theoretical perspectives we have characterised with the kind of rigour that would lead to an unequivocal judgement of veracity. This is so partly because the interpretation of evidence in as complex a situation as the one we describe is often open to more than one point of view, particularly where individual intentions are imputed. It is also not clear to us that the theoretical perspectives we have described lead to any clearly testable hypothesis which could be falsified. Nevertheless, we would still argue strongly that this does not negate the value of using concepts from these frameworks, as we have done. In so doing we have been able to increase our understanding of the processes that have influenced examination reform and have exposed areas for further theoretical debate. Eclecticism, we feel, is not a sin but a virtue if it serves these ends.

Sri Lanka - a brief introduction

Sri Lanka (Ceylon before 1972) formally gained independence from British colonial rule in 1948. This ended a period of colonisation lasting nearly 450 years. The Portuguese were the first European rulers arriving in 1505. Like their Dutch successors (1656-1796) they controlled only the maritime provinces in the South West of the island. The British took control of these provinces in 1796 and by 1815 had succeeded in gaining control of most of the island including the powerful Kandyan Kingdom in the highlands.

The population of Sri Lanka is currently estimated to be approximately 14 million, of whom about 70 per cent are Sinhalese, 22 per cent are of Tamil origin and the remainder are of mixed race or Muslims originally from Indonesia. The Sinhalese population is believed to have originated in North India more than two millennia in the past and has two main sub-groups - 'low country' Sinhalese residing in the wet zone around the South and West coasts and the 'Kandyan' Sinhalese from the high area in the centre of Sri Lanka. The majority of Sinhalese are Buddhist, though small numbers of predominantly low country Sinhalese are Christian. The Sinhalese language has its own unique script and is used exclusively by the majority of Sinhalese. The Tamil population resides mainly in the North, East and Centre of Sri Lanka and has two main subdivisions of approximately equal size but different status. Ceylon Tamils can trace their presence in Sri Lanka back over many generations while the Indian Tamils who arrived in the 19th and 20th centuries came to work as indentured labour on the British plantations. The Tamil population has its own language and script and the great majority are Hindus. In contrast to the Sinhalese, the Tamil population originated from the south of India. The residual population consists mostly of Burghers - the descendants of Europeans who settled in Sri Lanka and intermarried - and Muslims imported from Indonesia by the Dutch or descended from Arab traders. The population as a whole has been growing at about 1.7 per cent per annum over the last decade.

The economy of Sri Lanka has always been agricultural. In recent years approximately 50 per cent of the labour force has been directly involved in food production for local consumption (mainly the production of rice) and the production of cash crops for export. The latter consist mainly of tea, rubber and coconuts produced on plantations and 90 per cent of foreign exchange earnings came from these crops in the early 1970s. Employment in modern manufacturing industry accounts for less than five per cent of total employment and the service sector accounts for the bulk of non-agricultural jobs. In 1978 unemployment was estimated at nearly 20 per cent of the labour force and it is likely that there was considerable additional under-employment (Government of Sri Lanka 1978). In the early 1970s about 10 per cent of the working age population and 16 per cent of the total labour force were employed in wage and salary employment in the modern

sector¹ (Deraniyagala, Dore and Little 1978). Growth rates in the modern employment sector have typically been low, rising little above 1.5 per cent per annum between 1953 and 1971. The structure of the economy and employment associated with it shows the hallmarks of a colony. Historically investment was concentrated in plantation agriculture and export crops were produced at low cost with little value added by manufacturing processes. Revenue generated through this process was used to finance the colonial administration, build infrastructure necessary to support this kind of production and import manufactured goods. Since independence slow progress has been made in lessening dependence on tea in promoting manufacturing industry, and in taking local control of the productive process.

Average per capita incomes in Sri Lanka in 1979 were US\$230 making it one of the poorest developing countries. Income distribution within the country is remarkably even, however, with a gini coefficient of 0.49 in 1978, though this has been slowly rising since 1973 (Bank of Ceylon 1980). Alongside relatively even income distribution is a record of low infant mortality, high life expectancy and literacy, making Sri Lanka exceptional compared to other countries at similar income levels. One consequence of the high levels of schooling achieved (throughout the 1970s over 90 per cent of children entered grade 1 and over 45 per cent reached grade 9), and low growth rates in the modern sector has been a chronic mismatch of supply and demand for educated manpower. Expressed at its most simple the situation in 1976 was that approximately 330,000 school leavers were entering the labour market each year and less than 50,000 modern sector jobs were becoming available (Dore 1978). Nearly half of the school leavers had reached grade 9 or higher and were likely to have expectations of modern sector jobs and the formal qualifications that had in the past guaranteed access to such jobs (Lewin 1981).

In order to understand how this situation arose it is necessary to trace aspects of the historical development of the education and qualification system. Formal education in Sri Lanka has a long history. Temple and village schools within the Buddhist and Hindu traditions were established prior to the arrival of the European colonisers and Muslim education was provided through 'maktabs' and 'madrasas'. The curricula of all these institutions were religiously orientated, though there is some evidence that secular subjects were also studied (Rahula 1956, Gunawardene 1979, Jayasuriya 1969). Missionary schools were introduced by colonists and these eventually came to provide the bulk of school places by the twentieth century. Like their counterparts they maintained the religious orientation of schooling, though they taught through European languages rather than Sinhala or Tamil.

¹ Modern sector jobs refer to commercial, industrial, professional and government jobs with high status, relatively high income and long-term security. Typically these jobs require formal academic qualifications. The figures quoted above include all non-manual and manual job grades.

Examinations were an integral part of these early systems of education. For example Buddhist temple schools controlled progress through them by insisting on the attainment of several different levels of knowledge assessed by superiors. The first level, 'nissaya - samucchanaka', was generally reached five years after ordination and monks were required to commit to memory several Buddhist texts. The second level, 'parisupathapaka', was reached five years later and the final level 'bhikkunovalaka', after another five (Rahula 1956). There is some evidence that success in these examinations resulted in more than transcendental reward alone. Monks specialising in studies of the Canon were rewarded materially in ways which depended on their specialisation, particularly high reward being given to those who studied the texts on the Abhidhamma. Allocation of roles within the social hierarchy of the monastery depended not only on seniority but also knowledge of the Buddhist texts. A knowledgeable monk could gain promotion over more senior but less sagacious colleagues. Bronze bowls were awarded to monks who had studied meritoriously by King Uddaya I (797-801). Laymen who followed temple courses could gain paid employment in temples and monasteries on successful completion (Gunawardene 1979).

It was not until the period of British colonial rule that schools and examinations really began to play an important part in selection for employment of any kind outside the religious hierarchies. Under the Portuguese and Dutch the mission schools had begun to provide avenues through which the local population could gain access to work outside the traditional agricultural employment sector. However, the demand was small and the development of the system slow. Three years after the British displaced the Dutch, in 1796, Governor North established preparatory and post-preparatory schools with the express purpose that they be:

for the education of children of Burghers and of those of the natives whose families are eligible ... to dignities and charges given by government to the native servants (Jayasuriya 1979).

The curricula in these schools were orientated to Christianity and the learning of English. A 'Knowledge of English' was the educational requisite for boys admitted into the colonial government service. Those who graduated successfully from the preparatory schools were able to enter the low and middle grades; graduates of the single post preparatory school (known as the Academy and later to become the prestigious Royal College) entered the middle and upper grades that were not reserved for Europeans. Though it is not clear exactly how students were selected for progression in school and for government jobs it is evident that from this period in the early 19th century the link between school achievement and access to wage and salary jobs outside traditional employment began to become firmly entrenched. A new

'colonial elite' (later to become the national elite) began to displace in status the traditional elite in rural areas (Pieris 1976).

It was in the public sector that links between examinations and employment were most clearly established first. And it was in the arena of public sector jobs that some of the first conflicts between the Ceylonese and their colonial rulers were played out. The Ceylon Civil Service (CCS) was established in 1802. The term 'civil service' applied only to the administrative grades which were reserved for Europeans. Ceylonese had access only to less prestigious government service jobs. The Colebrooke Commission of 1833 reported on the training and recruitment of the civil service and recognised the inequities that this created:

The native inhabitants have a fair claim to public employment and it would be unjust and impolitic to prefer to them inexperienced persons of European birth in the various subordinate stations which they may be competent to fill.

It was not until 1844, however, that the first Ceylonese was admitted to the lower grades of the CCS. This position was gained only through promotion from a lower grade.

Until 1833 recruitment of British nationals into the Indian and Ceylon Civil Service was entirely in the hands of the Court of Directors of the East India Company. Directors nominated young public school graduates for admission to the Haileybury Training College in England where they followed courses in oriental languages, literature and history. The nominations were ratified by an oral test on entry and a final examination on completion of the course. After 1833 a Company Board of Control replaced the Court of Directors but the recruitment and training system remained essentially unchanged until 1853 when the Northcote Trevelyan Charter Act established the principle of open competition under which 'any natural born subject of her Majesty could be admitted to be examined as a candidate' (Misra 1977). The age of recruitment was raised to 20 years and a radically new examination introduced which reflected subjects studied by young men at Oxford and Cambridge. Competitive entry became a feature of first the colonial and later the home civil services. The Northcote Trevelyan system was welcomed by Ceylonese since it gave them at least a chance to compete in a rather unfair competition. It was also welcomed by the Victorian middle classes in England for other reasons. Public opinion was growing against patronage and 'aristocratic influence gained through jobbery'. The civil service was contrasted with those 'open professions to which a person could enter by his own efforts' (Warnapala 1974). It was not until 1870 that the new system affected local recruits although lobbying had begun for it to do so as early as 1860. The entry

examination for the CCS was held simultaneously in London and Colombo to the great satisfaction of the educated Ceylonese.

Such celebration was a little premature however. The entry examinations presupposed a high educational level including knowledge of Latin and a modern European language apart from English. Such knowledge was only realistically available in the UK at the established universities. Over the next 60 years the struggle continued to improve access to civil service jobs for Ceylonese and, throughout this time, the connection between government jobs and examination achievement grew to permeate the whole of government service from the CCS down to junior grade office boys. It was also during this period that aspiring Ceylonese first began to emulate on a large scale the colonial rulers they eventually replaced. Values, habits, dress and organisational behaviour gleaned from the British became part of the culture of the elite in a more general sense than had previously been the case.

From the outset school examinations in Sri Lanka were directed towards the selection of students for further education and government service and were controlled, set and marked externally. The only exception to this pattern in the nineteenth century was the introduction of a local eighth grade examination (1862). Although it was 'only a copy of what was going on at the time in England' it was nevertheless set and marked locally by the Department of Public Instruction (Government of Sri Lanka Interim Report 1972). This examination survived for 18 years before it was replaced by the UK set and marked Cambridge Local Examination in 1880 and the London Matriculation in 1882. In 1883 a Ceylonese candidate:

was placed twenty seventh in order of merit among competition from England, India and Ceylon and other colonies, and being the first among candidates from India and Ceylon he was awarded the Gilchrist scholarship to pursue further studies at London or Edinburgh (Jayasuriya 1979).

Little did this candidate suspect that he was creating a precedent for the aspirations of successive generations of students which deeply influenced the subsequent growth and structure of the education system. The principle of international certification and access to international labour markets through educational qualification was a natural outgrowth from these embryonic beginnings - though for some it would come to be seen as more akin to an ectopic pregnancy that should have been terminated.

The abandonment of local certification in favour of the readoption of foreign examinations has been interpreted both as a blessing and a disaster. Jayasuriya maintains that

foreign examinations provided all Ceylonese with a new confidence in their ability and potential:

An important consequence of the introduction of the examinations of the Universities of London and Cambridge into Ceylon was that the high standards of performance of some of the Ceylon students at these examinations dispelled the notion that the white race in general and the British in particular were superior ... and ... gave the people of Ceylon a new confidence in their ability. While the irrelevance of these examinations to the culture and socioeconomic conditions of Ceylon can hardly be denied, British examinations did much to remove from the minds of the people the feeling of inferiority that came from being a subject race (Jayasuriya 1979).

This contrasts with the view of the Select Committee appointed to enquire into Public Examination at Secondary School Level in 1972 which deplored the failure to build a local system of examining from these early beginnings:

There is nothing more tragic than the failure of this (local) examination. It had the potential of developing into an indigenous examination system. By discontinuing it we gave ourselves over to a long period of domination (beneficent of course) by examinations which were set and marked in England (Government of Sri Lanka 1972).

Jayasuriya's view of the foreign examinations as confidence boosting can, of course, be more narrowly interpreted to apply more specifically to the confidence of the national elite who had access to them. The mass of the Ceylonese people may have felt satisfaction at the time (if they knew) that some Ceylonese could successfully emulate the British. Contemporary Sinhalese, however, are equivocal in their approval. A common Sinhalese expression indicates this. 'Kalu suddo', which translates literally as black whites, is used perjoratively to refer to those who gained their contemporary advantages through early access to British education, examinations and jobs and who developed British habits, tastes, values and cultural aspirations. Those who were excluded from such access do not obviously share the positive evaluation of international qualification as a vehicle for national self-respect.

By the latter part of the nineteenth century the correspondence between educational levels and government jobs was well established. Access to education was itself dependent on other factors, being concentrated amongst groups who were socially ascendant for other reasons. Caste, ethnicity, sex, religion, language and geographical location were all major

determinants of access. The English speaking elite enjoyed preferential access to government jobs, burghers in particular adopting English as their mother tongue. The concentration of missionary activity in the maritime provinces gave low country Sinhalese early access to schools and contact with British culture, and similarly intensive missionary activity in the North around Jaffna gave some Tamils considerable advantages which have persisted to the present day.

The growth of educational provision through vernacular schools in the twentieth century did little to redress imbalances of access. Expansion took place within the context of a dual system in which English language schools were dominant. The prestige and traditions of these elite schools have continued largely uninterrupted despite the transition to vernacular teaching in all schools, changes to vernacular instruction in the universities in the 1960s, and the adoption of Sinhala as the official language of government. Contemporary conflicts between Sinhalese and Tamils, between low country and Kandyan Sinhalese, between Christians and other religious groups and within Sinhalese and Tamil caste groups are all partly influenced by the differential access of these groups to English language education and the opportunities that stemmed from it. High public positions are still dominated by English speakers. The faculties of the universities (medicine, engineering, science, law) contain disproportionate numbers of students from English speaking families (Uswatte Aratchy 1974). English language facility provides access to high status employment and is a defining characteristic of the 'national elite' as opposed to the 'local elite' formed by non-English speaking Sinhalese and Tamils from poorer rural background who, nevertheless, succeed educationally and enjoy substantial, but largely parochial, power over sections of the community (Roberts 1974).

The importance of examination success for access to wage and salary jobs grew continuously throughout the twentieth century. By the 1970s it was a precondition for all non-manual jobs in the modern sector and was increasingly being used to select for manual wage employment (Deraniyagala, Dore and Little 1978; Ministry of Plan Implementation 1978). Growth of educational enrollments, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels, outstripped demand from the economy for educated manpower with the predictable consequences of large scale 'educated unemployment' and 'qualification escalation' (ILO 1972). In a highly bureaucratised modern sector labour market the only option open to most students for gaining access to wage and salary jobs was to remain in the free education system and increase their competitive advantage over school leavers at lower levels. With high levels of unemployment the opportunity costs were low or negligible and many employers were explicitly using educational qualifications as a convenient filter to limit the number of applicants for jobs rather than select those with special talents.

There is another international dimension to the links between education and jobs in Sri Lanka which, though nascent from the turn of the century, began to come into prominence in the late 1960s. High levels of educational provision, local oversupply of high level manpower, low levels of remuneration and internationally recognised qualifications provided the conditions for the export of qualified manpower on a substantial scale. Between 1971 and 1976, 1,254 doctors, 1,074 engineers, 494 accountants, 141 university teachers and 1,325 other highly skilled personnel left Sri Lanka to work overseas - and this is almost certainly an underestimate. This 'brain drain' represented approximately 15 per cent of the total stock of professional and technical personnel available in 1971 (Nesiah 1978). The first wave of emigration was mainly to the UK, USA and old, developed British colonies. Increasing numbers in the late 1970s flowed to richer developing countries - Nigeria, Zambia, Malaysia - and large numbers of skilled and semi-skilled workers began to be recruited to the West Asian oil producing countries. Estimates for the latter over a two-year period from 1976-78 range up to 20,000 and by 1979 over 800 mn rupees per year was being repatriated by workers in West Asia (Daily News 1980). For all these jobs access depends on the possession of internationally acceptable educational and professional or trade qualifications.

Against this historical context and contemporary labour market pattern, the critical importance of examination success to individuals is clear, and there is plenty of evidence that its importance is widely perceived. Children of those who can afford private tuition attend additional classes in the evenings and at weekends and this phenomenon has become widespread. A recent survey of successful entrants to physical science courses at the University of Colombo revealed that 70 per cent had had private tuition in one or more subjects (Samaranayake 1978). Advertisements for tutorials abound in the press, many usurping familiar names - the Brighton Institute, the Oxonia Institute, Aquinas. Belief that personal effort is the major determinant of both success and failure in academic pursuits is widespread amongst parents and students (Little 1982) and echoes the earlier concerns of the British Victorian middle classes for meritocratic selection based on achievement. This 'modern' belief in the efficacy of personal effort (Inkeles and Smith 1974) is tempered by the assimilation of traditional beliefs and behaviour. Sinhalese buddhists seek the advice of astrologers who examine the client's horoscope for auspicious signs for study and examination. The gods of knowledge and wisdom, conveniently shared between buddhists and hindus, are implored for examination success. Pilgrimages are made to Kataragama and Anuradhapura to fulfill vows after examination success (Little 1982).

The interrelationships between power, prestige, educational qualifications, jobs, class and caste in Sri Lankan society are probably best summed up in the operation of the marriage market which is given public expression in the English language and vernacular national papers. Some examples from the English press serve to make the point.

Respectable Govigama Buddhist parents seek Doctor, Engineer, Chartered Accountant, Varsity Lecturer, CAS for slim fair daughter 29, Visakhian Science Teacher 65". Dowry over five lakhs, cash one lakh, two bungalows, coconut land, etc. Horoscope essential.

An accomplished English educated partner with means from a good family willing to go abroad for limited period is sought by respectable well connected Govi Buddhist Mother for son 32 years, qualified engineer, kind and understanding, employed abroad, now on holiday in Sri Lanka. Send particulars with horoscope.

Well connected Govi Buddhist parents from Colombo seek suitable girl for son, 31, teetotaler doing Civil Engineering Degree in London (Sunday Observer, 23 March 1980).

The desirable attributes are clear - 'govigama' is the highest Sinhalese caste; 'CAS' is the Ceylon Administrative Service the successor to the CCS; 'fair' means light skinned; 'Visakha' is the premier girls school with more examination distinctions at 'A' level than any other Colombo school in 1980; one 'lakh' is one hundred thousand rupees - a not insubstantial amount of money.

Against this historical background of the increasing use of public examinations to control access to modern sector jobs it was perhaps predictable that these examinations and the education system of which they were part, should come under increasing criticism as an inhibiting factor for development. It is to the events of the 1970s that we now turn to provide an empirical basis for the application of concepts derived from the theoretical frameworks discussed in the second section of this paper. Examination reform was seen during the 1970s to be a key determinant of social and economic development. It provides, therefore, a useful arena for the testing of the value of the competing theoretical constructs described earlier.

Examination Reform 1972-1982

The Change to NCGE and HNCE

In May 1970 the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) was returned to office in a coalition government that included Trotskyist and Communist factions. In its election manifesto (SLFP 1970) it had committed itself to improving equality of access to education and ameliorating the worsening problems of unemployment facing school-leavers. The ideological complexion of the coalition favoured a weakening of the links between Ceylon and other countries in so far as they led to economic dependence and loss of national autonomy. The development strategy that emerged focussed on the development of indigenous resources (Ministry of Planning and Employment 1971). This was reflected in educational policy:

The present type of education has also placed a premium on examinations and diplomas rather than the development of skills so necessary for economic development. Thus today in nearly all sectors, there is a tendency to depend on foreign technical skills and resources and the foreign expert, and foreign aid has become a substitute for the development of indigenous skills and resources. The present divorce of education from the world of work has uprooted an entire generation from the type of production which can readily be developed in the country and has pushed the person who would normally have gone into some productive activity into a fruitless search for white collar employment, the expansion of which can no longer be supported by the country's productive sectors (Ministry of Planning and Employment 1971).

An Education Review Committee was established in late 1970 to report on the restructuring of the education system in line with the new government aims and the first public suggestions that this would involve abolishing the Ceylon GCE 'O' and 'A' levels emerged in February 1971 (Ceylon Daily News 28 February 1971). The rationale for the abolition was the necessity of shifting the education system away from its dominant obsession with academic schooling. This rationale was consistent with the policy objectives of the government to vocationalise the curriculum (Ministry of Planning and Employment 1971). The proposal attracted strident criticism in the press. It was claimed that such a change would interrupt the education of pupils and that it would be change for the sake of change. The cry that there should be 'no more guinea pigs please' (Ceylon Daily News 28 February 1971) from the main teachers union, the Jathika Sangamaya, echoed the general reluctance to depart from the existing system.

Such reactions from groups who saw themselves threatened by changes that would require adjustment to new courses and

examinations and which appeared to reduce the chances of the children of educated and wealthy families progressing through the education system to university level were hardly unexpected. They may have been decisive in ensuring a still birth for the proposal had not the 1971 insurrection intervened.

For a few days in April 1971 the SLFP government was close to collapse as a result of a widespread insurrection throughout the country. The insurrection was apparently organised by disaffected youths who were frustrated at the slow pace at which the government was moving on its election promises to reduce unemployment and improve equity. According to one commentator, 85 per cent of those ultimately detailed had GCE 'O' level qualifications (Wilson 1972). A subsequent and probably more realistic analysis suggests that 75 per cent of all suspected insurgents had received some secondary education (grades 5-8 or GCE 'O' level, grade 10). Only 19 per cent had received primary education or none at all and the remaining six per cent were 'A' level and university students (Obeyesekere 1974). The insurgents were viewed as:

a deprived group but not a depressed group like a lumpen proletariat ... many of them would simply not be able to enter university either due to lack of vacancies there, or financial difficulties. Even if they did complete a university degree there was no guarantee of employment. Thus if they were not already aware of the bleak future that awaited them they could easily be made conscious of it. Their youth and idealism could then be tapped for a new movement that held promise for the future (Obeyesekere 1974).

The insurgency focused attention on the education system as a fomenter of insurrection and muted those who had previously opposed reform. Much of the public debate on the causes of the insurrection centred on educational structure in general and examination patterns in particular, (though the perceptive analyst would probably cast his causal net wider). As the Minister of Education put it:

In an education system that was little more than assembly line or academic factory, in the socially irrelevant context of education and in the chronic maladjustment between the educational process and the national economy, any person of discernment could see the source of tension and the ever-widening ripples of discontent sweeping the surface of our society. In the past few years school curricula and teaching have been geared to the university entrance examinations. From the time the child enters school the target is set on the university. Each

year only one per cent of the school population enter the university. So all the efforts and expenditure are for the benefit of this one per cent (Ceylon Daily News 1 June 1971).

After civil order had been re-established the embryo proposals of the Education Review Committee were revitalised. They resulted in a restructuring of the education system that was more far-reaching than it would have been had not the insurrection occurred (Wijemanne 1978). Those who argued that the time had come to abandon the colonially inherited pattern of education and examinations were in the ascendancy. As a result two new national examinations - the National Certificate of General Education (NCGE) and the Higher National Certificate of Education (HNCE) - were created to replace Ceylon's GCE 'O' and 'A' levels which dated from 1952 to 1964 respectively. NCGE was to be held from 1975 as the first selection examination in the education system, at the culmination of nine years of a general education curriculum with a 'prevocational' bias. HNCE was to be held after two more years of schooling, partly as a university qualifying examination and partly as a school leaving certificate for those who could not be accepted into higher education. Both examinations were intended to be of a kind which would shift the emphasis in achievement away from the recall of information towards the application of knowledge, and which would stress problem-solving and require the teaching of more directly useful skills.

Abandoning the 'O' and 'A' level examinations opened the door for curriculum change of a kind that, it was argued, could not take place within the existing examining structure. The school entry age was raised to six years and the total length of pre-university schooling reduced from 12 to 11 years; early selection for 'O' level streams in schools was abolished in favour of a common curriculum for all students up to grade 9 when the NCGE was to be held; new curricula were designed for all levels of the school system with the conscious intention of reducing academic content in favour of locally relevant job skills. Thus the Five Year Plan published in late 1971 argued for the introduction of prevocational studies as a compulsory examination subject. These were to be:

vocationally oriented curricula which are expected to stimulate an interest among pupils in the opportunities available at all levels for engaging in productive activities ... (The) aim is to shift labour from its present aimless search for non-existent white collar occupations to economic activities which increase the income of the country (Ministry of Planning and Employment 1971).

The spirit in which these reforms were introduced does appear to have indicated a genuine and novel commitment to improve the education of the majority of students who do not progress to the end of the system. (Only about 10 per cent of an age cohort reach upper secondary school and no more than one to two per cent the university).

There were occasional references to original sin in the discussions surrounding the introduction of the new structure ('The Devil finds work for idle minds and we saw the result of this last month' Minister of Education, Daily News 1 June 1971.) However, a much stronger and consistent theme on the discussion was that the new structure would serve 'the causes of intellectual do-colonisation' (Curriculum Development Centre 1975). Though there are precedents in Sri Lanka for attempts to introduce more vocationally relevant school courses, and examples of local examinations essentially unrelated to internationally recognised qualifications the scale and scope of the 1972 reforms was unprecedented. Moreover, they were more the result of internal conflicts and their attempted resolution than of any overt influences from external agencies. Although the ILO 1971 mission to Sri Lanka (ILO 1971) did see the broad framework of some of its recommendations on education incorporated into the 1972 government policy, there is no evidence to suggest that the Sri Lankan government was under any direct pressure to do so. As for more subtle psychological dependence on the wisdom of advice from outsiders, the then Secretary of the Ministry of Education was clearly well immunised:

Of all the great deficiencies created in our societies by colonial rule nothing is so pervading as a lack of moral courage and strength to think beyond the intellectualism imposed on us by the imperial powers ... The pre-occupation of us all with what occurs in developed societies has stifled our intellectuals, thinkers and innovators in education (Curriculum Development Centre 1975).

Curiously, however, it was felt necessary subsequently to justify some of the changes in terms of international comparisons. Thus the raising of the school entry wage to six years was defended by reference to a UNESCO study of 109 countries which indicated that only seven countries started schooling at five years and 55 at six years (Ministry of Education 1973) while the brief (and abortive) attempt in 1971 to introduce six-day weeks in schools to reduce 'cramming' was 'based on international consultation' (Ceylon Daily News, 6 June 1971).

The initial development work for the NCGE examinations to be introduced in 1975 was undertaken by the Curriculum Development Centre staff. The reforms aimed at 'improving the traditional examination by making it a more effective device for promoting the teaching and learning situation'

(Premaratne 1976). Trial examinations were designed not so much for the pupils but to encourage teachers to realise more fully the intentions behind the programmes and to change the pattern of their teaching. Attempts were made to involve teachers directly in the design of assessment items, and teachers in each district of the country were asked to contribute questions to a pool which would allow the construction of sample examination papers. This latter activity was not very successful since most items produced were found to be unusable - typically being judged too difficult for unselected pupils and/or inappropriately constructed. Many of the questions were thought to be too factually and descriptively orientated and typical of the 'O' level questions which NCGE was designed to replace (Lewin 1981).

Nonetheless the new examination was not markedly different from the old, probably because there was public pressure to retain some semblance of comparability with 'O' level even though the pupils who would be taking the course were non-selected ('O' level was selective) and the time allocation for teaching most subjects was substantially reduced compared to that for single subject 'O' levels. Concern with the competitive value of the new NCGE qualification in the labour market and for further education exacerbated these pressures. The desire to retain the overt objectivity of closed book, controlled condition examinations also limited the possibilities for significant departures from traditional formats of examining, and effectively ruled out school-based forms of assessment. Previous experience with a teacher-assessed component of public examinations had proved controversial, and great difficulty had been found in devising moderating procedures. In Sri Lanka the traditional written examination has been officially described as the only way of 'screening the candidates in such a way that favouritism, thuggery and low cunning are set at nought in selecting persons for jobs or further education' (Government of Ceylon 1972).

Practical examinations were excluded from the NCGE because of logistic and administrative constraints and past experience. A further factor acting to limit radical changes in examining was the continued reluctance of the universities to contemplate changes in admissions criteria. These were firmly grounded in notional comparability with the UK and, though it was unlikely that similar educational outcomes could be produced through the new education system, such concerns proved very influential. Downward pressure from the universities helped shape HNCE examinations and curricula and, through these, affected NCGE courses.

Thus the 'O' level pattern of a two paper written examination, the first consisting of multiple choice questions and the second of structured free-response essay questions, was

retained for most subjects with modifications to reflect the introduction of new content. It remained the case, however, that a very large proportion of the items in the NCGE examination tested the recall of factual knowledge and that it was possible for pupils to pass most subjects in the NCGE exam through performance on factual questions alone. Indeed, in the NCGE Integrated Science exam the proportion of knowledge items increased and the proportion of comprehensive and application items decreased when compared with the average characteristics of the earlier 'O' level single subject science exams (Lewin 1981).

The NCGE exam in the subject known as pre-vocational studies attracted the most sustained criticism. Pre-vocational studies was initially introduced with two main components. The first included the existing range of practical subjects taught in schools; the second permitted schools to individually or collectively design curricula for Ministry approval based on local economic activities. The latter initially resulted in 81 courses being approved in 1972, but by 1975 this number had dwindled to closer to 20 as the implications of assessing such a diverse range of programmes became clear. Though schools were supposed to make assessments of candidates which were to be aggregated with results from written centrally-set pre-vocational studies examinations, it proved impossible to moderate this process effectively, and in practice school results counted for little. Critically, pre-vocational studies was made a compulsory subject for progression to higher grades. Although it was not an academic subject, it was made compulsory so that it would be taken seriously by students and teachers alike. This increased the pressure to examine pre-vocational studies using traditionally accepted styled of examining, despite the likelihood that this would ritualise much of what was taught.

Growing Disillusion

The consequences of changes in the examination and education system became apparent between 1976 and 1977. Criticism began to mount and disillusion began to be voiced more strongly. Four main issues can be identified which gradually began to undermine support for the NCGE/HNCE examination reform. Firstly, as already noted, NCGE in most subjects could not be seen as strictly comparable to 'O' level even though it was argued officially to be so. NCGE was taken in grade 9, not grade 10, by non-selective groups from the whole ability range following a much broader curriculum. Levels of achievement were therefore necessarily less in particular subjects. This, coupled with a worsening labour market situation, exacerbated rather than improved employment problems for the educated. Employers, including the government, never resolved unambiguously the equivalence of NCGE qualifications with 'O'

level for job access. In its brief life NCGE never became established as an alternative qualification, partly because surplus 'O' level graduates were available for employment in large numbers from previous cohorts of school leavers, and employers generally valued 'O' level as a more reliable and higher level qualification. In any case, recruitment into the more desirable jobs in government continued to favour those with higher qualifications. (See, for example, the escalation of qualifications in the 'computer scheme' in Deraniyagala, Dore and Little 1978). Though the problem of worsening access to jobs was not exacerbated by the NCGE as such, in many people's minds the change did contribute to the difficulties, and the value of NCGE in the market place was seen as compromised.

Secondly, changes in the name of the examinations and the lower level of achievement represented by them made it even more difficult to argue that they were internationally accepted qualifications. The middle classes, in particular, felt threatened that the chances of their children studying abroad were being undermined. Arrangements were made for children of wealthy parents to sit the NCGE and simultaneously to work for the London and Cambridge overseas 'O' level to be taken in Madras or Singapore. In actual fact, Sri Lankan 'O' levels were not automatically recognised in the UK in the 1970s, though, for historical reasons, they carried some credibility domestically - and probably internationally - not shared by the NCGE and HNCE. It was also true that 'cramming' in private tutorials increased during this period as parents with surplus income who valued educational achievement sought increasingly to maximise their children's chances of selection for further education. Though this probably would have occurred anyway, it was another nail in the coffin of NCGE.

Thirdly, the view that NCGE was 'selling students short' began to spread and was not confined solely to the urban middle classes. Rural parents were not universally enamoured of changes which gave their children one year less schooling, decreased academic content in favour of pre-vocational orientation, increased their children's chances of remaining in low-wage casual and traditional employment, and which in the short run, actually reduced promotion chances from the NCGE to the HNCE grades. Though the evidence on the latter point is complex and it was true that overall numbers progressing to upper secondary education almost doubled when NCGE was introduced, there is evidence to suggest that this disproportionately favoured urban well-established schools. These institutions had the most competent staff, had relatively good resources, and had good communications with the Curriculum Development Centre and Examinations Department. They were therefore able to adapt to new examinations much more rapidly and effectively and this was reflected in the initial examination results (Lewin 1981).

Fourthly, pre-vocational studies, a main-stay of the new education system, began to fall increasingly into disrepute. After the first NCGE in 1975, when significant numbers of candidates (including many urban candidates) were initially denied promotion because of their poor performance on the compulsory pre-vocational studies, a public outcry weakened the Ministry of Education's resolve. This resulted in special provision being made for resits to be allowed after promotion, and eventually the compulsory nature of the subject was compromised. Increasingly too, urban parents argued that much of the pre-vocational study was irrelevant for their children whom they hoped were destined for modern sector employment. Rural parents and pupils became more cynical of programmes based on skills which they felt the community already possessed and were not best taught by middle class teachers in schools. Some pre-vocational studies, eg gem-cutting, relied on special skills with an economic value not willingly shared in a tight labour market, while others depended on caste-based occupations, (eg toddy-tapping, fisheries) unattractive to pupils outside the caste group. The need to examine skills and knowledge formally and fairly also reimposed a straightjacket which stunted the enthusiasm of teachers and pupils for them.

By 1977 these and more subtle concerns had produced fairly widespread dissatisfaction with NCGE and HNCE examining and the educational structure with which they were associated. Educational reform again became a major election issue and the installation of a new government effectively sealed the fate of the 1972 reforms. The attractions for many of returning to the 'golden age' of 'O' and 'A' level examining and the education system comfortably legitimised by long-standing practice and international precedent began to favour a conservative policy to turn back the clock ...

1977-82: The Return of the Old Order?

The United National Party swept to power with an overwhelming majority in 1977. As a party of opposing convictions to the SLFP, and which traditionally drew its support from the business community and the conservative establishment, it was committed to returning to educational standards that were 'internationally comparable' and promoting the formation of 'competent elites'. Under its auspices the powerful, though small, lobby whose interest was to re-establish access to internationally recognised qualifications in Sri Lanka was able to make its voice heard, and the new Minister accepted the need to facilitate this.

The entire question of the curriculum has been severely criticised both by parents and educationalists as having been unilaterally

introduced by the Government without carefully examining (a) the suitability of the subject matter (b) the books (c) the availability of teachers (d) the alignment of the NCGE examination with general practices in other countries. At the new 'A' level provision will be made to promote students should they so wish to sit the English (London external) 'A' level examination, in Sri Lanka (Ceylon Daily News, 2 December 1977).

As part of a total package the Sri Lanka 'O' and 'A' level were reintroduced as examinations (though much of the curriculum material from NCGE/HNCE courses was retained), the school entry age was lowered to five years and the 'O' level taken in grade 10 as it had been before 1972. Prevocational studies was dropped as a compulsory examinable subject and proposals were advanced for University colleges in each of the island's 22 administrative districts. In raising the school entry age, the UNP appealed a large segment of the rural population that had always felt short-changed by the raising of the age to six years in 1972. Political capital was made from the argument that providing one year's less schooling in Sri Lanka than in the UK was creating a 'second class' education system.

It is an indication of the paradoxes of Sri Lanka's education policy that the issues of international comparability and access to external examining should apparently carry so much weight in influencing the structure and content of the curriculum. The numbers involved in sitting and succeeding in such examinations are extremely small. It is estimated that about 1,000 pupils sat for London external 'A' level examinations in 1978 after it was decided to allow them to be held in Sri Lanka again (Daily News 20 January 1978). Only a small proportion was successful. These numbers compared with the 75,000 students who took local 'A' level examinations in 1978, a figure which had climbed to 128,000 by 1982 (Sri Lanka 29 July 1982). Official entry fees for an external examination are high compared to typical incomes. Entering one candidate, for example, can cost a parent the equivalent of two months of a graduate teacher's salary. Nevertheless, the deputy Minister of Education could argue persuasively that 'people are perturbed over the present system of examination, which is only accepted locally. This system will be changed so that our qualifications will be accepted the world over' (Daily News 21 December 1977).

In fact, locally designed Sri Lankan 'A' levels had never carried formal international recognition since they were introduced in the early 1960s. Concern over the foreign exchange cost of paying fees to overseas examining bodies was a major reason for the withdrawal of provisions for London 'A' level examining in the late 1960s though it was impossible

to prevent students from taking such exams in Madras and Singapore. Though apparently some students sat Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) and American University entrance examinations, the majority took London 'A' levels. British degrees are still considered to have a currency as job passports that American first degrees lack, and London 'A' level provided access to them. Historically the relative cheapness of British higher education for foreign students and the long dependence on British 'standards' are other obvious explanatory factors, though the former is no longer true (William 1981). Some of the animosity directed towards HNCE programmes has its origins in the dissimilarity of these courses with London 'A' level programmes. Candidates taking Ceylon 'A' level could take London external 'A' level without major adjustments to their study programmes; HNCE students wishing to sit for the London external 'A' level had to study two rather different syllabi.

As noted in the previous section, a further factor hastening the demise of NCGE/HNCE was the development of a substantial external labour market for Sri Lankans. Until the late 1960s outflows of manpower from Sri Lanka were fairly small and confined largely to the highly qualified - doctors, engineers, accountants, etc. The development of the West Asian labour market in the late 1970s changed this and large numbers of lower-skilled people began to work overseas and to repatriate substantial earnings. By 1981 Rs 4,400 (US\$219 mn) was being sent back in foreign exchange and this had become the largest foreign exchange earner after tea exports (Rs 6,444 mn). The government became increasingly enthusiastic about encouraging this flow and argued that qualifications would contribute to the ability to take advantage of the opportunity. With over 50,000 Sri Lankans in West Asia in 1981 and the President keen to double this number the logic was appealing. The government had by then 'decided to take the exodus in its stride - and never mind the brawn and brain drain' (Sri Lanka News 29 July 1982).

By reintroducing local examinations inherited from the colonial past the new government was being 'fair'. According to the Minister of Education the reintroduction was justified by saying:

The government (will) allow any student to go abroad for studies. The member for Anamadawa has apparently forgotten the generosity his leader (the previous Prime Minister, Mrs Bandaranaike) had offered only to her children. Whether it be London 'A' level examinations or the Russian 'A' level we will not shut the door for our children (Daily News 19 December 1977).

But the question remained as to the wider consequences for the development of the education system. Once again decisions on content were likely to be largely circumscribed by

examinations which were externally orientated towards standards and content selected in metropolitan countries.

The changes in the examining and education system introduced in 1977 were far less ambitious and more limited than those of 1972. They appear to have had their formative influences in a strong desire on the part of UNP supporters to replace what they saw as the discredited NCGE/HNCE system with one which resurrected the familiar and widely accepted 'O' and 'A' level qualifications and re-established their credibility in local and international labour markets. The main changes - changing examination titles without radically affecting their content; raising school entry age and returning to the structure existing before 1972 and abandoning compulsory pre-vocational studies - were rushed through in a flurry of conservatism. They were largely justified by eulogies for the recapture of academic quality and the re-integration of the education system into internationally accepted patterns consonant with the open-door policy of the new government. Some of the reasoning was clearly inaccurate. Sri Lankan 'O' and 'A' level did not become internationally recognised merely by the expedient of renaming the existing exams. It was also true that threats to the interests of the new urban power elite from the NCGE and HNCE were more imaginary than real. Rural pupils probably saw their chances for progression worsen in the first years of NCGE, and compulsory pre-vocational studies did not prevent many promotions of able urban middle class children. Nevertheless, the reasoning captured the imagination of the decision-makers and the changes went ahead.

Further reforms in education and examinations were proposed in August 1981 (Education Proposals for Reform, Government of Sri Lanka 1981). Coincidentally, one of the main architects of the 1972 proposals was recalled from retirement to act as an adviser in drafting these, though they were inspired by a different political constituency. The thrust of these proposals at school level incorporates administrative reorganisation of the 9,500 schools into 1,000 'clusters' to function as the smallest administrative units in the system; curriculum development initiatives, some at cluster rather than central level; the introduction into secondary schools of 'Life Skills' with a pre-vocational element; stress on the development of basic skills including English language; the re-introduction of a junior secondary school (grades 6-8) assessed at cluster level with nationally set papers in first language and mathematics; the modification of senior secondary schools (grades 9-11) to include a nine-subject curriculum of which five will be nationally examined and which will be accompanied by the introduction of pupil profiles. These proposals are currently at an early stage of refinement and are unlikely to be widely implemented until after the next election, scheduled for 1983. It is premature, therefore, to comment in much detail on them, but

some observations are pertinent. The reintroduction of assessment at the Grade 8 level has already attracted the criticism that it will effectively become a selection examination (as its forebear the Junior School Leaving Certificate was) to be used to channel students to good schools and stream classes for the GCE. Though this use is denied by the Ministry of Education, it seems likely that this fear has some justification. Diagnostic testing without selection consequences has never been well established and it must be doubted that many teachers have the skills to construct assessment instruments sensitive to specific learning problems.

Problems of assessment are likely to be exacerbated by the introduction of school or cluster-based assessment of non-cognitive attributes in, for example, work-oriented studies, co-curricula activities, sports and creative activities. These attributes are clearly desirable but previous attempts do not have a successful record and, a priori, it is difficult to have confidence that new attempts to introduce them will prove more acceptable. The two largest problems - that of ensuring freedom from subjective bias and of the technical competence of teachers in making such measurements - remain substantial obstacles. It could also be argued that such assessments are likely to reward disproportionately the articulate, well-behaved, wealthy child.

The proposal to introduce school clusters as administrative units does have a number of strong arguments in its favour. Specifically excluded, however, are the largest, most well-established schools (which are attended disproportionately by the urban elite) which will be allowed to remain as "Unitary Schools" and preserve existing patterns of organisation and considerable independence. The interests of relatively well-endowed schools and parents, therefore, apparently remain well catered for. It would be churlish, however, to argue that the intention behind the introduction of clusters is anything but an attempt to improve the quality of schooling in the rest of the system.

A final observation is that the five academic subjects chosen for national examination at GCE level (First Language, Mathematics, English, Science and Social Studies) seem likely to retain their pre-eminence as subjects critical for selection for further education. Though life skills, including technical and aesthetic studies, will be tested at district level and 'personality development records' will be maintained to broaden assessment profiles, the chances that backwash from the nationally-assessed subjects will continue to dominate teaching and learning must be high. Proposals to improve the quality of examinations, rationalise the Examination Department, decentralise some functions, make more use of criterion reference instruments and continuous assessment, may succeed in combatting this to some extent.

Having explored in some detail changes in examining structures over time in Sri Lanka, we now return to the original theoretical concerns of this paper and link them directly with the case histories presented. The final section of this paper, therefore, seeks to establish the relative merits of the analytical constructs offered by modernisation and neo-classical theory on the one hand and by neo-Marxist and dependency perspectives on the other.

Examination Reform and Theoretical Perspectives Reconsidered

In the second section of this paper we argued that both neo-classical and dependency perspectives on education and development interpret educational change in terms of responsive adjustments to changes in the broader social system. Though the possibility is admitted by both that educational change can lead social development, this is typically considered aberrant and transient and unlikely to persist. In Sri Lanka, the 1972 educational reforms which constitute a major focus of this paper were in large measure a response to a deteriorating set of economic and social relationships within the country and were catalysed specifically by the upheaval of a violent insurrection. A key feature of the reforms was change in the structure and administration of examinations held to select students for further opportunities and hence occupational and social status. Several possible interpretations of this sequence of events are possible, but none seems to lead clearly to unequivocal support for the validity of either set of theoretical perspectives. Firstly, we will consider the general cases that can be made in terms of general propositions on change. In succeeding paragraphs we will examine sequentially these and subsequent reforms in examinations from the standpoint of the key differences in theoretical frameworks identified earlier.

A temptingly straightforward interpretation of the events of 1971 and 1972 leading to the introduction of NCGE and HNCE is simply this. The insurrection focused attention sharply on the dysfunctionality of the existing education system and its inability to educate, socialise and select students for roles in society which they were prepared to accept. The reaction of those delegated to resolve the crisis - the legitimately elected government and its professional advisers - was to formulate educational policy in such a way that a new equilibrium could be established with a more balanced set of relationships between educational output and available occupational opportunities. The most effective way of achieving this balance was to introduce new curricula with a prevocational bias and a new system of examining to support the new curricula. Change, therefore, followed in the wake of functional breakdown and was conceptually systemic

homeostasis. A potential instability was met by concerted actions to equilibrate. This, of course, would match closely a neo-classical functionalist interpretation of change.

On the other hand, it could be argued that since the insurgents were an organised lumpen-proletariat (in opposition to Obeyesekere's interpretation) the insurgency was not just a social perturbation that was allowed to get out of hand; it was the expression of a pathological conflict of interests between class groups. The 1972 reforms were thus a compromise forced on the governing elite but not directly in their interests.

The dilution of the 1972 reforms over time and their eventual dissolution can equally be viewed from the two perspectives. Firstly, it could be argued, the changes made were actually not sufficient to guarantee functional stability. Allowing quality to suffer, introducing a broader curriculum which failed to socialise children appropriately and distancing the examining system from established and internationally recognised patterns, had consequences which at best did not prevent growing instabilities. Under these circumstances a return to the old system, at least in appearance, offered the security of a tried and tested set of procedures widely recognised, through familiarity if nothing else, as legitimate.

More conspiratorially, on the other hand, the gradual undermining of all the significant changes could be seen as the slow re-establishment of control of the system by the traditional power elite. As the imperatives of the crisis created by the insurrection receded into the past, those with power and control over the education system gradually reasserted their dominance and steered its form back to that which had successfully reproduced their class interest for so long. Radical groups lost their influence and the system was re-fashioned in a form which served the urban middle classes more than it promoted the interests of the rural poor. In the ebb and flow of class war the national bourgeoisie had once again achieved the upper hand and revolutionary conflict had been staved off.

On a general level it is possible to argue either point of view with some plausibility. The imprecision of the theoretical frameworks in providing sensitive indicators which would allow one set of constraints to demonstrate clear explanatory superiority is partly the reason for this. Some progress can be made by analysing developments more specifically in terms of the key differences identified earlier in the theoretical approaches, and these will now be considered.

Normative Consensus, Class Conflict or Punctuated Equilibria?

The first difference between the perspectives lies in the description of the normal mode of social interaction between groups and individuals. For modernisation theorists consensus is the norm. Conflict is a pathological deviation. For dependency theorists conflict is the norm. Consensus is a pathological deviation. The recent social history of Sri Lanka is one which is not characterised by overt social conflict if major social indicators are considered. Major crises, particularly those resulting in violence, have been the exception rather than the rule and the insurgency represents an atypical sequence of events. Conflict has certainly been present but, with the exception of ethnically motivated violence, has not generally been characterised by confrontation between groups expressing sectional or class interests. The unusually small armed forces and police force are indicative of this. More often than not educational change and changes in the examining system have been motivated by fairly general dissatisfaction amongst diverse groups. Both the 1972 and 1977 changes were initially accompanied by acceptance and support rather than energetic resistance. Most observers would agree that the 1977 UNP government had a substantial mandate to abandon NCGE and HNCE. Unquestionably there was widespread support for the change amongst urban wealthy parents and rural parents. It may be, of course, that the latter were suffering from a form of 'false consciousness', but much of their discontent did seem to have a ring of truth about it. Prevocational courses did not assist rural children in gaining modern-sector jobs, qualification escalation meant that rural children needed more rather than fewer years of schooling to gain jobs, and many rural schools were doing worse in the first NCGE examinations.

Theoretically, it might be more useful to view educational change and examination reform in Sri Lanka as a series of 'punctuated equilibria' (borrowing from recent biological evolutionary theory) rather than as functionally stable or conflict ridden. Significant changes have often been associated with crisis - the breaks with overseas examining hastened by the Second World War; the 1972 reforms. Typically, though, long periods of stability have existed where little change has taken place, development being very gradual, as though on a developmental plateau.

Group Interests and Individual Dependency

The second key difference identified is concerned with relative emphasis on individuals or groups as agents of change. Here it is again difficult to ascertain which level of analysis is most enlightening. Though the insurrection was a

conflict between organised groups the educational response to it depended heavily on the actions of individuals within the Ministry of Education. It would be difficult to maintain that these individuals were acting in a particular group's interests. The initial ad hoc nature of much of the response suggests a classic bureaucratic reaction to unusual events, with what co-ordination there was coming from a small number of highly placed individuals. Initiation of examination reform was inspired by a few individuals and undertaken by the small groups of professionals with the capacity to carry them out. Subsequent disillusion with the reforms was fairly widespread and expressed through institutional mechanisms and, arguably, reflected the threat that these groups of people felt. Similarly, the 1977 reversion to previous patterns of examining was individually inspired, though it apparently had fairly widespread support.

The framework of dependency theory does perhaps have a novel insight to offer the analyst though, paradoxically, this seems most significant at the individual level. An explanation, at the individual level, of why NCGE and HNCE examinations did not offer radically different forms of assessment to 'O' and 'A' level, must take account of the psychological dependence of professionals on externally defined models of appropriate instrumentation. Junior members of staff charged with the task of operationalising the rhetoric of reforms may well feel most secure with practices legitimated elsewhere. Staff steeped in the traditions of examining established by UK overseas examining boards may well turn to them as models to be adhered to fairly closely. Even in the absence of direct pressure, a kind of 'law of anticipated reactions' may operate to keep divergences from existing practice within fairly narrow bounds. Such individual level dependency can also be used to explain partially why much of the curriculum development of NCGE was modelled on UK courses even though there was little direct external pressure to do so (Lewin 1981). Similarly, the return to 'O' and 'A' level in 1977 can be interpreted as resulting partly from an inordinately deferent faith in developed country examination systems though, a priori, they are not necessarily better nor more appropriate.

A Concern with Competency and with Access to Inequality

The third key factor relates to the legitimacy accorded to selection through competitive examinations. Functionalists argue that such meritocratic selection is inevitable and essential in any differentiated society, while neo-Marxists tend to see it as merely a device for legitimating differences in income and status primarily dependent on other factors. This difference of opinion overlaps with, but is not entirely coincident with, the debate on screening and human capital

which has a considerable literature associated with it, some of which relates to Sri Lanka (Derairiyagala, Dore and Little 1978). It is clear that the 1972 reforms were motivated, at least in part, by attempts to move away from early selection and streaming, on the grounds that this was an uncertain process which acted more in the interests of some groups than others. This was not a denial of the need for selection. Indeed it could not be in a country with such a highly bureaucratised labour market where access to most jobs was dependent on educational qualifications. Nor was it a rejection of the notion that education could provide useful skills which should be certified. In replacing the well established examining system it did create a problem of acceptance of new qualifications which was never solved effectively. As already noted, NCGE and HNCE were never widely recognised by employers, and even the government itself was ambivalent about their status.

On the surface, the 1977 reforms were a reassertion of the fairly 'hard' neo-classical view that qualifications of the traditional kind did represent achievement in a meritocratic contest and that rewards should be allocated using this as a major determinant. Since most of the population recognised the legitimacy of this system, firmly grounded in the long history described in a previous section, no immediate problem of acceptance existed.

On the other hand, the subsequent proposal for the reintroduction of grade 8 national examining and maximising of the chances of elite children attending 'unitary' schools does seem consistent with a view that this represented a thinly veiled attempt to re-establish the status quo pre-1972. This was one which, some would argue, provided a meritocratic legitimacy based on a myth of fair competition when in fact the chances of success were heavily loaded in favour of particularly advantaged children. Apologists for the 1977 changes would argue that the retention of district quotas for examinations ensuring rural pupils' participation and promotion and the inclusion of non-academic assessment in fact made the system fairer to the underprivileged. (Overlooking the possibility that within districts it might still be the privileged children who succeeded, that wealthy children could move to poorer districts and increase their chances, and that non-academic performances might well also favour children from wealthy backgrounds).

A more balanced view of the various attempts at change might plausibly conclude that the scope for change was actually very limited, whatever the intentions behind it. Examinations as selectors and allocators of opportunity are politically a very sensitive area. Any proposals to move from closed book, fixed time limit centrally set examinations have always been met with opposition from those who fear that special interests will bias results. Typically questions which are not linked

directly to specific teaching material and which can not be memorised and reproduced have been charged with being 'unfair' by urban and rural parents alike.

It is probably true that existing examinations do identify on a meritocratic basis large numbers of students who possess particular abilities. 'O' and 'A' level examinations are widely regarded as legitimate ways of identifying ability and selecting students, despite the imperfections apparent to any analyst who studies their performance. At the same time, it is true that a much smaller number of individuals, with a disproportionate amount of educational advantage, do owe the legitimization of their positions partly to examination success in a competition in which they had an inside track.

The Importance of Historical Context

Neo-classical and neo-Marxist/dependency theory interpretations of educational development differ in the importance they accord to historical context. Neo-classical explanations tend to focus on contemporary circumstance and play down the influence of accumulated experience as a conditioning factor for change. Our analysis supports the contention that historical patterns of development have both conditioned change fairly directly and, arguably, have determined its nature in some respects, thus supporting the reasoning of some dependency theorists (eg Dos Santos). The form that the 1972 reforms finally took was proscribed in important respects by the history of development of education and examining which set some limits on what was likely to be regarded as legitimate and feasible. The basic role of educational examinations in social selection, long accepted as desirable, was not challenged fundamentally with any real force though initially it seemed it might be. The re-establishment of 'O' and 'A' level after 1977 was more a result of a wish to resurrect the past than a response to compelling functionally defined needs. Mismatches of supply and demand of educated manpower provoked changes in 1972 (as neo-classical theory would predict) but these ultimately had little real impact on the changes introduced and the pressures that began to effect them over time. The institutional and individual dependence referred to above can also be seen most convincingly as a product of a continuing set of historical relations, less coercive and more voluntary than in the past, but nevertheless powerful factors in conditioning changes.

This is not to argue that contemporary factors were not significant. The re-emergence of a governing elite more committed to open door economic policies with greater sympathy for international flows of labour and capital was obviously important for the 1977 reforms. But the detailed nature of reforms, both in 1972 and 1977, we would argue, cannot be

understood without full consideration of the long history of examination development and the interplay of interests which shaped this, many of which are still active. History has also been important in determining the quantity and quality of skilled professionals available to implement examination reform, and this has been a critical factor in moulding changes as have the institutional forms through which they work.

The Role of Elites: Beneficent Modernisers and Conspiratorial Hegemonists

The fifth difference concerns national elites and their role in the development process. Are the ruling elite to be seen as beneficent modernisers acting in the communities' interest as well as their own with appropriate amounts of noblesse oblige and hubris, or are they more accurately to be described as self-serving agents of international (or national) capital, satisfying their own needs for the accumulation of wealth and power?

One way to explore these issues is to consider the extent to which changes were introduced as a result of links with international or transnational elites. In the early 1970s there was little direct gain to international interests in the changes introduced. No flows of capital (in the form of examination fees, etc) were involved and since the thrust was towards delinking the education system from a colonially inherited pattern, most of the advantages were argued to accrue to the domestic economy (though some changes were justified by reference to changing international norms). Nevertheless, it was true that both politicians and professional advisers were influenced by international conferences and by international development missions which, generally speaking, were advocating changes broadly in sympathy with what was proposed. Though there was no substantial general return to this it may be that some individuals were motivated by the international recognition that followed from this and the job opportunities that opened up as a consequence in international agencies for displaced politicians and senior advisers. Some took advantage of this subsequently. By and large the national elite did not have much to gain; indeed their position was threatened by changes which would open up access to educational qualifications and which were thought to reduce the advantages they enjoyed in educational provision. Thus it would seem that the conscientiously modernising elite model fits more easily to the 1972 events than does one which sees them arising out of naked self-interest.

The 1977 changes, on the other hand, are easier to see as the result of the interests of particular elites becoming dominant. Though again few direct external interests were involved (the

external examining fees were not initially substantial enough to be seductive to external examining bodies, and no evidence of lobbying is apparent) it was clearly in the interests of elite parents to re-establish access to the lucrative international labour market for their children. The government could argue, with some conviction, that it was acting in the interests of all Sri Lankans and point to remitted revenue from foreign workers to illustrate how this benefitted the economy, but the distribution of benefits was, at least initially, fairly narrowly spread. Similarly it could be argued that the announcement of yet further reforms, concentrating on administrative changes in 1981, was yet another attempt to deflect attention from the basic problems of education which revolve around allocation and selection.

Only an unrepentant cynic could dismiss the very considerable work of the professional members of the education service as merely self-serving, cosmetic tinkering to shield the continued interests of the class group to which most of them belonged. On the other hand, the present education system, with its emphases back towards many of the characteristics of that existing in the 1960s, does seem to favour the urban elite and their interests rather more than nearly two decades of development might be thought to warrant. The 'flexibility' of the Sri Lankan civil service is legendary, as is its ability to limit radical changes to those which do not dramatically alter the status quo. In these respects it is similar to many highly bureaucratised organisations. But it is not necessary to postulate Machievellian intent to explain this, as any student of organisational theory knows. It is to a discussion of the key question of intentions that we now turn.

Voluntary Compliance and the Resilience of False Consciousness

The final conceptual difference we isolated in our initial theoretical discussion was concerned with the extent to which development could be viewed as evolutionary and the inevitable consequence of consensual interests, or the extent to which it is the outcome of the promotion of interests by dominant groups and their conscious subversion of the interests of the relatively powerless. This is a key question because it embodies elements of all the other differences and must be at the centre of any attempts to explore development from the perspective identified.

As we have already argued, there is no compelling evidence that strong, conscious, interests external to Sri Lanka sought to influence development and change in educational and examining structures in ways which had a direct pay-off for anybody. It does seem to be stretching a point to suggest that, for example, the psychic pay-off to the members of the

1971 ILO mission in seeing some of their recommendations incorporated into policy, was evidence of an international conspiracy. Only the most sanctimonious purist would hold that all such forms of consultation and freely commissioned advice were co-opted to serve international capital. A more refined thesis of the importance of external international pressure depends on the unconscious acceptance of ideas and arguments from the outside in a non-coercive framework. The subtle absorption of the values, attitudes and policy prescriptions of members of international elites through continuous contact with them by decision-makers responsible for negotiating and projects, attending conferences etc. almost certainly does occur and has some influence on educational change. But precisely how would appear unpredictable and not necessarily consistent. Some external factors did influence the 1972 reforms and their detailed articulation as they did in 1977 - and quite possibly in 1981. (Note the international justification used for first raising the school entry age and subsequently lowering it). But these were not consistent pressures from a single motivated source intent on maintaining Sri Lanka as a dependent economy. On the contrary, it seems that internal political conflicts produced governments willing to allow themselves to be influenced in ways that suited their purposes at the time. The contrast with colonial dominance is tempting. Coercive compliance with external forces has been replaced by something more accurately described as conditional or voluntary compliance embedded more in domestic priorities than truly international ones.

It remains possible that these processes merely reflect what has been described as one of the most patronising elements of dependency theory - that developing countries often develop comprador elites with no real domestic power bases and which act fairly arbitrarily in response to changes in the international climate. Thus the 'populist' 1972 reforms reflected the conventional wisdom of international development theory in the early 1970s, while the more conservative strategies in the late 1970s reflected the growing climate of opinion against the efficacy of self-reliant development. The ultimate insult of this position is that the developing country cannot even produce a decent, exploiting elite of its own.

There could be no greater slur inflicted on our capabilities: we are nincompoops, we are unable to ensure a local supply of exploiters, the process of exploitation has to be initiated elsewhere ... This itself is neo-colonialism of a sort.
(Indian Economic and Political Weekly 23 April 1977).

It is clearly wrong to argue that social power in Sri Lanka is dependent solely on external legitimization; the local ruling families of both main political parties are well established

and, though certainly fortified with international links, do not owe their existence to them. If these elites are unduly wedded to external educational traditions it must now, some 25 years after independence, be because of voluntary compliance with past precedents; if most of the population share this 'dependence' then those who argue that this is false consciousness must explain its resilience and durability.

Summing Up

When we commenced this paper we were puzzled by the scarcity of serious attempts to identify key aspects of neo-classical and dependency development theory and apply them to educational change in general and examination reform in particular. The complexities that our attempt has led us into lessen our puzzlement. In many respects neither set of constructs is incompatible and the narrowly testable propositions that emerge from them are really very sparse. As with many theories of social development, their application depends on a description of events which is itself tempered by the constructs used to select information. It is therefore frequently possible to use evidence from the same series of events to support apparently difference interpretations, though ideally it should become clear that one set of constructs provides ultimately a more convincing tapestry of understanding.

A thorough understanding of the events in 1972, 1977 and 1981 clearly does benefit from the use of more than one set of analytical constructs. Paradoxically, this sometimes throws up insights missed by analysts within one tradition which are not necessarily those which can be predicted by abstract consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of the frameworks themselves. Thus it is a dependency perspective which highlights the importance of individual level dependency in shaping some changes, though this perspective on the whole is more concerned with group and class analysis than individual motives and competencies.

We started out this paper as non-partisans for a particular approach and must conclude that we remain so. Excepting the naive excesses of over zealous acolytes within the analytical traditions we discuss, we find much of value in both. There may be cases much more clear-cut than the ones we have chosen to examine, but we suspect these are the exception rather than the rule. If this paper succeeds in catalysing more attempts by those more competent, but hopefully as open-minded, as we to utilise abstract theoretical development frameworks to explain detailed case histories of educational development and account for a full spectrum of often confusing evidence, it will have served its purposes. Too often theoretical debate is atrophied by unrealistic purity of its assumptions and its contribution to the development process is consequently like the sound of one hand clapping ...

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